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PRICE of EDIBLES and POTABLES in A.D. 1506. By COLONEL  
W. H. SYKES, M.P., F.R.S., *President of the Statistical Society.*

[Read before the Statistical Society, 15th December, 1863.]

I AM indebted to the Master of the Salters' Company, Alderman Gibbons, who obligingly acquiesced in my application for a copy of a bill of fare, with prices and quantities attached, of a dinner for fifty members of the Salters' Company in 1506, three years after the true English shillings were first coined, before which the Saxon shilling was 5*d.* and then 4*d.*, and the Normans introduced a nominal shilling of 12*d.*; and three years after Henry VIII married Catherine of Arragon, and fourteen years before the interview of Henry and Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold on the 31st May, 1520. It was plainly a very modest feed, which their successors of the present day would inevitably eschew, for the whole cost of the dinner for fifty people was just 1*l.* 13*s.* 2*d.*, or about 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ *d.*, say 8*d.*, per head, or one-fifteenth of what the members of the Statistical Club pay for their dinner without wine, and one-sixtieth or one-ninetieth of a public or corporation dinner with wines. But the bill of fare tells us of something more than of the frugal habits of the worthy Salters,—it tells us of the marvellously contrasted relations between prices and provender in 1506 and 1863. It tells us also of the feelings of the age with respect to the constituents of a grand civic dinner, suitable to the dignity of a City Company; for we find perfumes were used, at the cost of 2*d.*, and the vessels were garnished at the cost of 3*d.* But the dignity of the entertainment seems to have been indicated by the most costly item in the bill of fare, namely, one *swan* and four geese, 7*s.* Now as there were twelve pence to a shilling in those days as now, although only nine pence to an Irish shilling, consequently the average cost was 16 $\frac{3}{10}$ *d.*; but we may fairly consider the noble swan estimated at half-a-dozen geese, which might make the cost of the dish of the swan nearly one-sixth the cost of the whole dinner. Evidently the tastes and the teeth of the gastronomers of the day must have been very different from those of us degenerate moderns, or they must have found the mastication of the noble bird, supposing him to have attained a mature age, but poorly compensated by the dignity of the display, great as it must have been if the price of the bird be a standard of comparison with the price of the poor chickens (to us degenerates modern objects of luxury), thirty-six of which were put

upon the table for 4s. 6d., or one penny halfpenny each; for which, alas, in these days, notable housewives have to pay from 24 pence to 60 pence each; and the bill of fare tells us that fifty eggs cost *two pence*. Those were days for rich custards and puddings, one feature of what was thought necessary in John Bull's repast before the introduction of French cookery is wanting; there are no massive joints, no sirloins of beef, no haunches, saddles, or legs of mutton, and no pork joints at all, the only contributions from quadrupeds being two rumps of beef tails and four breasts of veal, and nine rabbits, the latter costing 7 farthings each. There is a total absence of fish, which would seem to imply there was not a fish market, or that the supply was scanty and dear, although the Fishmongers, one of the great and wealthy companies of London, date from 1384, or 122 years before the date of the dinner. Six quails cost 3d. each, an extravagant price compared with the chickens. The potables were limited to a kilderkin of ale,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  gallons of Gascoigne wine, and a solitary bottle of sweet Muscovadine; as the kilderkin contained 18 gallons, or 72 quarts, the lieges needed within a fraction of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  quarts each, at  $1\frac{2}{14}$ d. per quart, to wash down the probably tough swan; and the tarts and 4 gallons of curds, at a penny a gallon, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of comfits at 2d., were associated with the consumption of rather more than a pint of wine per head, at  $1\frac{1}{14}$ d. per pint; although the Cape of Good Hope had only been passed eleven years before the date of the dinner, and the West Indies discovered only fourteen years before, the scarcer and costly products of tropical India found their way to the Salters' table; the contributions, no doubt, of the overland trade carried on by the Venetians. There are 2 oz. of pepper, at 2d., from the Malabar Coast, and 2 oz. of cloves and mace, at 4d., from the Moluccas; 3 lbs. of sugar, at 8d., must have come from India; dates from Arabia or Morocco, and raisins from Spain or Turkey,—testifying to England participating, in Henry VII's day, in the trade with remote regions,—but little contemplating its expansion to 335 millions in 1863. The Salters' bill of fare has no charge for the article of salt, and there are no apples and, of course, no potatoes. The worthy Salters did not confine their enjoyments to the gastric regions, but incurred the expense of 2d. to perfume their persons or the atmosphere of their hall; nor did they omit a manifestation of their taste in *garnishing* the vessels at the cost of 3d. Evidently the services of the cook were estimated in a disproportionate ratio to the total cost of the dinner, for the remuneration of 3s. 6d. was nearly one-tenth of the total expense; but whether his skill was manifested in a "premier service" entrées, relevé, and entremets, as at the dinner at the Salters' Hall of which I had the gratification of partaking, on the 18th November, 1863, the bill of fare of 1506 does not enlighten us.

Water was a marketable commodity, for 3*d.* was paid for the supply for the cooking. Our coal-fields were then contributing fuel, for 4*d.* was expended for a quarter of a load, but what that load weighed, whether so many cwts., or a cart load, or a chaldron, or any other quantity, the bill of fare does not say. Finally, the bill of fare does not enlighten us about toasts and speeches, characteristics of modern public dinners. Possibly our ancestors were too simple minded to attempt to win applause by addresses which too frequently sacrifice truth to rhetorical display and conventualities.

*A Bill of Fare for Fifty People of the Company of Salters, A.D. 1506.*

	£	s.	d.
36 chickens .....	—	4	5
1 swan and 4 geese .....	—	7	—
9 rabbits .....	—	1	4
2 rumps of beef tails.....	—	—	2
6 quails .....	—	1	6
2 oz. pepper .....	—	—	2
2 „ cloves and mace .....	—	—	4
1½ „ saffron .....	—	—	6
3 lbs. sugar .....	—	—	8
2 „ raisins .....	—	—	4
1 lb. dates .....	—	—	4
1½ „ comfits .....	—	—	2
Half hundred eggs .....	—	—	2
4 gallons of curds .....	—	—	4
1 gallon gooseberries .....	—	—	2
Bread .....	—	1	1
1 kilderkin of ale, 18 gallons beer measure.....	—	2	3
Herbs .....	—	1	—
2 dishes of butter .....	—	—	4
4 breasts of veal.....	—	1	5
Bacon .....	—	—	6
Quarter load of coals.....	—	—	4
Fagots .....	—	—	2
3½ gallons of Gascoigne wine .....	—	2	4
1 bottle Muscovadine.....	—	—	8
Cherries and tarts .....	—	—	8
Verjuice and vinegar .....	—	—	2
Paid the cook .....	—	3	4
Perfume .....	—	—	2
1 bushel and a half of meal .....	—	—	8
Water .....	—	—	3
Garnishing the vessels .....	—	—	3
	<u>1</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>2</u>